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Office of University
Communications

August 5, 2017

Students from Traditional Undergraduate, Degree Completion, and Graduate Programs Honored

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner–Webb University hosted Summer Commencement on Saturday, Aug. 5 in the Lutz-Yelton



Convocation Center at 10 a.m. More than 200 traditional undergraduate, degree completion, and graduate program students were honored for their achievements during the ceremony.

Many graduates participated in the ceremony through prayer and scripture readings. Charles Neely Bryan (Stem, N.C.), who earned a Doctor of Ministry, offered the invocation. Sharon Faye Creed-Hall (Chesnee, S.C.), who earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice, shared passages from the Old and New Testaments.

Awards were also given to those who achieved scholastic excellence. Rebecca Lynn McMillan (Millers Creek, N.C.), who earned a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice/Human Services, received the Degree Completion Program Academic Award. James Chase Renfro (Forest City, N.C.) earned a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science and was given the Senior Scholastic Achievement Award.

During the ceremony, the 1,500th RN-BSN degree was conferred. The University also bestowed doctoral degrees to graduates in the first cohort of the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership. The program launched in August 2014.



Michael Blackwell, president/CEO of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina for nearly 35 years, provided the commencement message, which was titled "Be a Little Ridiculous." He encouraged graduates to resist assimilation. "Keep on learning and growing and serving and thinking," he advised. "Follow your bliss, know your passion—what makes your heart sing, your spirit soar, and your blood boil. But, be a little ridiculous along the way. If anyone ever says to you, 'That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard,' then you know you're on the right track."

During the ceremony, Blackwell was presented with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree. Noting Blackwell's achievements, Gardner-Webb President Dr. Frank Bonner described him as a person of true distinction. "Conferring an honorary doctorate is a hallowed tradition at GWU, a singular and serious way of honoring not just the individual himself but also that person's service and leadership in a chosen area," Bonner stated.

Blackwell, a native of Gastonia, N.C., graduated from UNC Chapel Hill, where he worked at the local radio station as well as writing for The Daily Tar Heel (Chapel Hill) and two major dailies, the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer and Raleigh (N.C.) Times. Following three years as news director at a radio station in Charlotte, Blackwell entered Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., where he earned three degrees and worked part time as news anchor at WRAL-TV in Raleigh and held two interim pastorates. After seminary, he pastored two churches over a 10-year period.

"Under Michael's leadership, Baptist Children's Homes has adopted a simple, but powerful vision statement—'Sharing hope, changing lives,'" Bonner offered. "At Gardner-Webb, we feel a sense of kinship with the Baptist Children's Homes as Christian organizations with a clear commitment to service and leadership."

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).